DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 703 FL 026 479

AUTHOR Antrim, Nancy Mae
TITLE Beyond the Classroom: A Role for Linguistics in Community-Based Learning and Teaching.
PUB DATE 2000-01-00
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (Chicago, IL, January 6-8, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Community Education; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; English (Second Language); Higher Education; Interviews; Language Attitudes; *Linguistics; Participant Observation; Questionnaires; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; *Sociolinguistics; Student Research; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS El Paso Independent School District TX

ABSTRACT

This paper explains how and why the author involved her undergraduate sociolinguistics students in doing field research in a local Texas elementary school. She notes that a continuing concern for linguistics education has been the viability of undergraduate linguistics programs. She agrees with other researchers and argues that one way to strengthen these programs is to involve undergraduates in making a direct contribution to the field through research. She advocates implementing procedures for community-based learning by providing students with real opportunities to learn by doing research outside the classroom in real-life situations. Accordingly, she supervised 38 undergraduates in her upper level sociolinguistics course as they interviewed 132 elementary school children, seeking to investigate the attitudes of the students directly affected by bilingual education. This pedagogical process included devising the research question, designing the survey instruments and questionnaires, and discussing techniques for interviewing the children. They were then instructed in how to analyze their data and present their findings. It is concluded that this was a very useful and successful teaching technique for undergraduate education, and in contributing to the field as a whole. (KFT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 703

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Nancy Antrim

1

Beyond the Classroom: a role for linguistics in Community-based Learning and Teaching*

Nancy Mae Antrim
University of Texas at El Paso

A continuing concern for linguistics in education has been the viability of undergraduate linguistics programs. Innovative methods for introductory courses such as Cari Spring's work at the University of Arizona and innovative programs, such as those at Ohio State, San Diego and Carleton College, have been presented at recent LSA meetings. In all these courses and programs the focus has been on how to make linguistics meaningful to the students by relating the course to student experiences. One way to further the relevance of linguistics for students is to provide them with opportunities to make a contribution to the field.

A recent university-wide effort to increase student retention has involved community-based learning and teaching. At the University of Texas at El Paso, the Institute for Community-Based Teaching and Learning was established through a grant from the Kellogg Foundation. First established in connection with the health initiative involving health sciences with its existing emphasis on multi-disciplinary, holistic approaches to teaching

* This paper was originally presented at the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) annual conference held in Chicago, January 6-8, 2000.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FL026470

and learning in which teams of students, faculty and community partners work together on community activities, the institute was expanded to include business and liberal arts, where it was at first implemented in sociology, history and political science classes. Historically few courses in liberal arts have been connected to the community since there is not a strong tradition of learning outside the classroom in these fields such as there is in the health internship-clinic model. The primary goal in expanding the program to include faculty and students in the colleges of liberal arts and business as stated in the program proposal is "to promote change in traditional University teaching . . . by strengthening the connection between the classroom and the community."

The project was designed to:

_ Foster partnership among community, University, and social services

_ Identify and solve community problems and while educating UTEP students

_ Provide multi-disciplinary educational opportunities for students, faculty and community

_ Promote active learning

_ Provide faculty development opportunities and expand faculty reward systems to include recognition of community based work

_ Promote student participation in communities

Community-based learning and teaching incorporates the ideas of service-learning with community partnerships providing students with opportunities to learn by doing outside the classroom in real

life situations. This approach has applications for linguistics courses as it provides a means for undergraduate students to become involved in linguistic research as researchers. With this in mind my undergraduate sociolinguistics course became a testing ground for community-based teaching and learning.

In spring 1999 there were 38 students enrolled in my upper division undergraduate sociolinguistics class. While a linguistics course, it is cross-listed with sociology and there are no prerequisites although the introductory linguistics course is recommended. This past spring roughly 1/3 of the students in this course were linguistics majors and had taken several linguistics courses beyond the recommended intro course; another 1/3 had had only the intro course and the remaining 1/3 had never taken a linguistics course. In addition to the standard required readings and topics for a sociolinguistics course, these students were given the opportunity to design and implement a linguistic research project involving a local elementary school. In addition to the project, which accounted for 20% of their grade, the students were also required to write 3 short papers, prepare 15 précis cards on outside readings and take both a midterm and a final exam. The project was graded on the final product, which was a report of their research findings.

Before the class project began I enlisted the aid of one of the computer lab directors. He became our computer resource person. With his help we were able to have a computer set aside for our use in the faculty computer room of the computer center. And he was "on-call" during the entire semester for my student

researchers providing technical help both with the computer and the program we were using. All data entry was done on our designated research computer providing us with a central data base, using Excel for Mac. Their project was a socio-linguistic study of language use at a local elementary school. The school selected is located in a primarily Hispanic neighborhood in El Paso, Texas, which is situated on the border across from Juárez, Mexico. With the recent political developments in California and Arizona renewing the debate over bilingual education and while numerous studies have looked at student test scores, dropout rates and parental responses (Stergis (1995), Shin and Gibbons (1996), Schecter et al. (1996) among others), this study would look at the attitudes of the students directly effected by bilingual education. Investigating the attitudes and behaviors of children with respect to language use should provide insight into the changing linguistic norms of this border community, making the student researchers more sensitive to issues related to language and society in their own community, as well as provide useful feedback to the school.

In class we designed a survey questionnaire. The questions were designed to elicit information concerning the socio-demographic and academic background of the students as well as their choice of language for a variety of purposes, contexts and interlocutors. In addition to being asked about their language proficiency, students were asked to rate their level of agreement to statements about the value of Spanish for them personally along a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from strongly

agree to strongly disagree. The students were also queried as to their feelings toward Spanish and English, the two dominant first languages of the area. Several sample questions from the survey are given here.

(1) Sample questions from questionnaire:

4. What term do you use to describe yourself?
   a. Hispanic
   b. American
   c. White or Anglo
   d. Other (African-American)

9. I feel I speak Spanish
   a. excellent
   b. well
   c. fair
   d. poor
   e. not at all

17. What music do you prefer listening to?
   a. Spanish music only
   b. English music only
   c. music in both

23. Spanish makes me feel part of a group.
   a. strongly agree
   b. mostly agree
   c. neutral
   d. mostly disagree
   e. strongly disagree

29. Spanish is a beautiful language.
   a. strongly agree
   b. mostly agree
   c. neutral
   d. mostly disagree
   e. strongly disagree

After designing the questionnaire, the student researchers were instructed in how to interview and an interview schedule was set up with the elementary school. Originally only 5th and 6th graders were to be interviewed, but not all the parents agreed to their child's participation, so the project was extended to include 4th graders as well. The school arranged for permission slips and

clearance was obtained from the school district's office of research. Each of the student researchers was to interview 4 students. To minimize disruptions to the school, my students were encouraged to go in pairs or groups to the school if possible. They were given 2 weeks to complete the interviews. The timetable for the project is given in (2).

(2) Timetable for project:

Feb. 15-26	Interviews
March 1-19	Code and record data
March 22-April 2	Select and analyze variables
April 5-16	Write report
April 20	Report due

After instructions from our computer consultant on how to create a data base, the interview results were coded and entered into a common data base by the student researchers. To insure uniformity in recording the data, I set up the data base labels and provided a "how-to" record data guide sheet on the computer to remind students of the instructions given by our computer consultant. After compiling the data base, the student researchers were organized into research groups. Group instead of individual reports were used because of the size of the class and in order to avoid duplication of variables analyzed. These groups generally reflected the interview groups. The research groups selected and analyzed sets of variables depending on the size of their research group with two people per set of variables analyzed. So that if the group had four people they had to select and analyze two sets of variables. Since this was not a statistics class, we used basic data summaries and comparisons. As they worked on the project, any issues raised by their research were tied into the assigned

readings and class lectures/discussions. Their analyses grouped into four main categories:

1. **Analyses regarding first language** including first language learned X participation in bilingual education and first language learned X semantic differential items;
2. **Analyses regarding Spanish language proficiency** including Spanish proficiency X GPA and Spanish proficiency X Spanish makes me feel like part of a group;
3. **Analyses regarding English proficiency** including English proficiency X ethnicity and English proficiency X GPA; and
4. **Analyses regarding language choice** including Reading language choice X highest academic degree expected.

Their final reports were to include a description of the variables they selected, tables illustrating the results of their analysis, their conclusions drawn from their analysis and finally the implications of their research for the school. The final analyses were compiled, published and presented by the students to the principle of the elementary school and to the district's central office. The presentation to the school involved an informal pizza party attended by the student researchers, the students interviewed, the principle and me.

Since the project was intended to benefit both linguistics students and the community, results and recommendations for the school were included in the report. One interesting conclusion drawn repeatedly from the research was the benefit/desirability of speaking Spanish with a strong recommendation supporting bilingual education.

Galindo (1995) in a study of Chicano youth in Austin, Texas, found that Spanish use as well as Spanish-accented English carried the sigma of foreignness, resulting in an avoidance of Spanish by these Chicano youth. In a border community, Spanish may be more readily found in both the public and private sector. Teschner (1995) concludes that it is in fact El Paso's proximity to Juárez, Mexico that has influenced the maintenance of Spanish both publicly and privately in El Paso. Nevertheless, while the results of this study show that publicly and privately Spanish plays an important role for mono- and bilingual children in El Paso, it is English that is preferred.

This project was designed to provide an opportunity for undergraduates in sociolinguistics to develop an awareness of the linguistic characteristics of this community and a knowledge of what linguistic research entails. They had the opportunity to put into practice what they were learning in the classroom. By publishing the results, the students were able to recognize the applicability of their research efforts. This research was made available as a service to the community in the hopes that the information would be of value to other schools in the district as well as other students in linguistics. Moving undergraduate students out of the classroom into the field gave the students an actual research experience and provided valuable information to the elementary school and district.

Would I do this again? Most definitely! Since this was the first time I taught this course, I can't say that our research project was the only factor in the success of this course, but I

feel it was a strong factor in keeping students in the class. Only two students out of the original 40 who enrolled dropped out and they dropped out early in the semester. Of the remaining 38 students there were only two failures and 27 (71%) students made a B or better. Students' comments on the course evaluations overwhelmingly cited the research project as what they liked best about the course.

Would I do things differently? Yes. I would start earlier in the semester as we had a number of logistics problems. Having to work around the elementary school's testing schedules increased the amount of time needed for interviewing. There was also the delay in getting approvals - an unanticipated delay as I was blissfully unaware of the amount of paperwork involved with offices of research. I would switch to SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences). The ease in using the new version of SPSS would make it possible to incorporate more of a statistical analysis into the project without requiring extensive class time in teaching statistics; although in the future I plan to schedule more statistics in the class.

I will be teaching sociolinguistics. And we will be moving out of the classroom into the community to research first-hand the relationship between language and society.

References

Curiel, H., J. Rosenthat and H. Richek. 1986. Impacts of Bilingual Educationn on Secondary School Grades, Attendance, Retntions and Dropouts. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences 8 (4): 357-367.

Fernandez, R., R. Paulsen, and M. Hiranko-Nakanishi. 1989. Dropping out among Hispanic Youth. Social Science Research 18: 21-52.

Galindo, D. Letticia. 1995. Language attitudes toward Spanish and English varieties: A Chicano perspective. Hispanic Journal of Behavorial Sciences 7. 77-99.

Schecter, Sandra R. et al. 1996. Bilingual by choice: Latino parents' rationales and strategies for raising children with two languages. Bilingual Research Journal 20 (2): 261-281.

Shin, R. and B. Gibbons. 1996. Hispanic parent perceptions and attitudes of bilingual education. The Journal of Mexican American Educators, 16-22.

Stergis, R. 1995. Connections between bilingual program parents and their children's schooling. Ph.D. dissertation: Boston University.

Teschner, Richard V. 1995. Beachheads, islands, and conduits: Spanish monolingualism and bilingualism in El Paso, Texas. International Journal of the Sociology of Language 114. 93-105.

White, M. and G. Kaufman. 1997. Language Usage, Social Capital, and School Completion among Immigrants and Native-Born Ethnic Groups. Social Science Quarterly 78 (2): 385-398.

nantrim@utep.edu